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Allegiances

RiverClan:

Leader: Shellstar- Blue-gray tom with broad shoulders and blue eyes

Deputy: Splashheart- White tom with amber eyes and a splash of black fur on his chest

Medicine cat: Mossdapple- Tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat with amber eyes (Apprentice, Honeypaw)

Warriors:

Berrytail- Black tom with green eyes and a short tail

Beetlewing- Gray she-cat with white patches and blue eyes (Apprentice, Troutpaw)

Flickerfoot- Yellow tabby she-cat with a white front paw and green eyes (Apprentice, Petalpaw)

Birdstrike- Silver she-cat with blue eyes (Apprentice, Hailpaw)

Streamheart- Blue-gray tom with amber eyes (Apprentice, Bristlepaw)

Beechclaw- Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Cherryleap- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Russetclaw- Red tom with green eyes

Rippletail- Silver tabby tom with amber eyes (Apprentice, Mistpaw)

Waveripple- White tom with wavy dark gray patterns and blue eyes (Apprentice, Pikepaw)

Patchfur- Tortoiseshell tom with amber eyes

Flamewhisker- Orange-and-white tom with green eyes

Leopardpelt- Pale yellow she-cat with black spots and blue eyes

Grasswing- Gray she-cat with light green eyes

Apprentices:

Honeypaw- Thick-furred golden tom with blue eyes

Troutpaw- Gray tabby with amber eyes

Hailpaw- Gray-and-white tom with blue eyes

Petalpaw- Pale cream she-cat with green eyes

Mistpaw- Silver tabby she-cat with green eyes

Pikepaw- Pale brown tabby tom with blue eyes

Bristlepaw- Brown she-cat with gray patches and amber eyes

Queens:

Willowfeather- Pale gray she-cat with blue eyes, expecting Russetclaw's kits

Minnowheart- Black she-cat with green eyes, nursing Waveripple's kits (Fawnkit, a fawn-colored tabby she-kit with green eyes, Shadekit, a small black she-kit with blue eyes, and Icekit, a white tom-kit with blue eyes)

Ottersplash- Cream-colored she-cat with blue eyes, nursing Shellstar's kits (Stormkit, a dark gray tom with amber eyes, and Lilykit, a pale tabby she-kit with blue eyes)

Elders:

Poppyheart- Dark red she-cat with green eyes

Silverear- Frail silvery-gray she-cat with one ear and blue eyes

Spotpelt- Black tom with white ears and spots on his fur, amber

eyes

Raggedtail- Ruffled black tom with amber eyes

Prologue

The quiet night was interrupted with a yowl from the nursery: "Minnowheart's kits are coming!"

A tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat burst from the medicine den, her amber eyes shadowed with worry. "Honeypaw! Bring some chervil and ragworts."

A young golden tom, his jaws filled with fragrant leaves, followed his mentor to the nursery. "They've arrived early!" He gasped.

A small crowd of yawning cats had gathered in the clearing, murmuring to each other. A shrill wail echoed into the eerie night.

A tom whose startling white pelt was swirled with dark gray patterns paced at the entrance of the warm den, his blue eyes sharp with anxiety.

"Minnowheart will be fine, Waveripple," A silver tabby tom reassured the restless warrior. "She's young and healthy."

"Easy for you to say, Rippletail," Waveripple growled. "Its not *your* mate that's having her kits early."

"But it might not be long before Leopardpelt moves into the nursery!" Their sister, a beautiful tortoiseshell, purred.

"Everyone, stay calm!" A deep yowl sounded from the loud talking among the cats. A huge blue-gray tom had spoken, his blue eyes flashing. "No one here is helping Minnowheart right now. The clan needs to be well rested for tomorrow, and gossiping will just make you all exhausted tomorrow. Everyone except Waveripple needs to go back to sleep."

Waveripple dipped his head slightly towards his leader gratefully as the other cats went back to their dens.

After a while, when he had started to doze off, a cream-colored

queen whose belly bulged with her unborn kits emerged from the nursery. "You have three healthy kits, Waveripple!"

"Really?" The white tom sat upright, his ears pricked. "What about Minnowheart?"

"Fine, but a bit weak." The she-cat flicked her tail invitingly. "You can go in and see her, if you'd like."

Waveripple pushed his way inside the warm den, and his eyes landed on a black she-cat, her nest soaked with blood. Three small kits laid sleeping by her belly, their thin fur spiked up.

"Minnowheart!" He purred. "How are you feeling?"

"A bit tired," The black queen's green eyes were filled with happiness. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"They're perfect," Waveripple breathed. "This one looks like you."

"I want to name her Shadekit," Minnowheart whispered. "This little tom-kit is as white as snow!"

"His name will be Icekit," Waveripple purred. His gaze fell on the last kit, whose pelt was a beautiful fawn color. "And the kit will be Fawnkit."

Opening Eyes

"She's finally opening her eyes!" A now familiar voice jolted Fawnkit out of her sleep. That was Minnowheart, her mother. Something furry tickled the tip of her nose, and she sneezed.

"Oops! Sorry!" Her littermate, Icekit, squeaked. Minnowheart had told her that Icekit had opened his eyes the day after they'd been kitted, though Fawnkit and Shadekit had yet to do so.

Though it seemed that Shadekit's eyes were finally opening.

"Wow!" Her sister squealed excitedly. "All these colors! I can finally see you, Icekit! Wow, you're so white."

"I want to see too!" Fawnkit stumbled towards her mother's furry belly, feeling upset as Icekit and Shadekit both rustled in their nest.

"Your eyes will open when the time comes," Minnowheart mewed gently, wrapping her tail around her. "You'll be surprised to see how beautiful the world is! Just wait patiently."

I don't want to wait! Fawnkit grumbled to herself. She scrambled out of then nest, and slowly pried her eyes open.

The nursery was bigger than she'd thought, with soft bundles of green moss on the ground. A pale cream queen, who's belly was heavy with unborn kits, was watching her with glowing eyes. Two small kits, one a startling white, the other black, tussled together, fighting playfully. A beautiful black she-cat with dark green eyes looked at her with excitement.

"Go join your littermates, young one," She purred. "Go and explore the camp!"

"Icekit!" Fawnkit yowled, barreling into her brother and sister. "Shadekit! Minnowheart said we can explore the camp!"

"You opened your eyes, too!" Shadekit jumped out of the way as

Icekit tumbled to the ground. "Come on, Icekit! Stop playing around!"

Fawnkit batted the black she-kit over the ears.

"Hey!" Shadekit growled playfully. "You want a real fight?"

"We can do that later," Icekit squealed. "I'm going outside!" Fawnkit followed her littermates outside the nursery, her paws tingling with excitement.

Finally, she could see the camp she'd one day protect with her life!

Exploring the Camp

As soon as she raced out of the nursery, Fawnkit almost rammed right into an orange-and-white tom.

"Watch it!" He growled.

"S-sorry," She stammered. The tom's green eyes suddenly softened, and his growl turned into a purr of amusement.

"You're Minnowheart's kit, right?" He asked. "Looks like you've finally opened your eyes! And your littermates, too!"

"Fawnkit! Why are you stalling?" Icekit called. His bright blue eyes flitted to the warrior, then landed back on her. "Shadekit and I are going to check out the fresh-kill pile!"

"I- I need to go," Fawnkit muttered nervously. She hurried after her littermates, not looking back.

"I'm Flamewhisker!" The older cat mewed after her. "I'll be happy to help you out!"

"Wow, you were talking to a warrior!" Shadekit breathed as Fawnkit caught up to her. "That's so cool!"

"I smell something tasty!" Fawnkit purred. "I think it's the fresh-kill pile."

The three kits scrambled to a stop besides a large pile of prey. A plump trout was lying at the top, its round eyes unseeing.

"I see you've found the fresh-kill pile." A pretty yellow she-cat with a white front paw approached them. "I'm afraid you're still too young to eat prey!"

"We were just looking!" Icekit protested. "Did you actually catch that big trout?"

"I didn't," The she-cat purred. "But my apprentice did. I'm Flickerfoot, by the way."

"Whose your apprentice?" Shadekit asked.

"Petalpaw. The pale cream she-cat over there." Flickerfoot nodded to a young she-cat, who was showing a younger apprentice a battle move.

"Wow," Icekit sniffed at the dead trout. "When I'm a warrior, I'm going to catch a huge trout like this one!"

"I'm going to catch two, then!" Fawnkit squealed.

And I'm going to be the best warrior in RiverClan!

The River

"Psst! Fawnkit!" Fawnkit blinked sleepily, yawning. Icekit's pale pelt was barely visible in the darkness, and the only thing visible on Shadekit were her sharp blue eyes.

"What is it?" Fawnkit mumbled. "It's barely moonhigh!"

"Shhh!" Shadekit glanced around nervously. Willowfeather, who had recently moved into the nursery with her belly bulging with Russetclaw's kits, was soundly asleep, and Ottersplash, the cream-colored queen, was snoring softly, Stormkit and Lilykit, who had been kitted two moons ago, both fast asleep besides her. Minnowheart murmured something in her sleep, and then fell silent. "We're going to go to the river. Do you want to come with us?"

"What? No!" Fanwkit whispered. "We're not six moons old yet! Kits aren't supposed to leave camp."

"We're two moons old!" Icekit mewed in a hushed voice. His bright, ice-blue eyes glowed in the dark. "Aren't you sick of the same old camp?"

"We'll be apprentices soon," Fawnkit reasoned. "We'll be out as much as we like."

"But I want to get out now," Shadekit almost wailed. "I'm so bored!"

"It's the middle of the night!" Fawnkit hissed. "How can you be bored?"

"We'll go without you, then," Icekit turned around, his tail swishing behind him. "Come on, Shadekit!"

The small black kit hurried after Icekit. After a moment, Fawnkit quietly stepped out of her nest and darted after her littermates.

"Wait!" She mewed. "I'm coming with you."

"Great!" Icekit purred. "It'll just be a quick look, and we'll come back."

Oh, great StarClan! Fawnkit thought. *I have a terrible feeling about this...*

"Wow! It's so big!" Shadekit squeaked. Fawnkit gazed around in wonder, shivering in the cold. The river was huge, its roaring water slamming against great gray boulders.

"I'm ShadowClan!" Icekit squealed. "I'm going to eat you alive!"

"No, you're not!" Shadekit yowled, racing towards the river. Fawnkit followed, and battered her littermate with quick blows.

"You can't catch me here!" Shadekit leaped off the shore, and landed clumsily on a small stone in the river.

"Shadekit! Be careful!" Fawnkit gasped, but broke off as Icekit tumbled past her.

"Oh yeah?" He challenged, before making a flying leap onto the rock where Shadekit was standing. The white kit batted her across the ear, purring.

"Oh no!" Shadekit purred, and she quickly jumped to another rock. Icekit followed, his thorn-sharp teeth bared.

Fawnkit watched nervously, her heart dropping whenever one of their steps faltered.

"Woah!" Shadekit stumbled as one of her paws splashed into the water. The dark, foamy water reached for her fur, and soon the small kit was clutching onto a rock for dear life.

"Shadekit!" Fawnkit yowled.

"Help!" Shadekit coughed, before the river swallowed her up.

"Shadekit!" Icekit wailed. "Fawnkit! Go get help!"

Fawnkit stood, frozen from terror, as she watched her sister's dark head go under the water. After a moment, she snapped out of her faze and raced towards the camp.

"Help!" She yowled. "Shadekit's drowning!"

Rescue

"Shadekit?" Minnowheart raced out of the nursery.

"The river!" Fawnkit mewed between gulps of air. "We were all playing and then Shadekit fell in!"

Fawnkit's father, Waveripple, burst out of the warrior's den and ran after his mate. Everyone emerged sleepily from their nests, and followed the two towards the river.

"Fawnkit!" Icekit wailed as they approached. His thick white fur was plastered to his sides, streaming with water. "I can't find her anywhere! I searched the water!"

"Shadekit!" Minnowheart yowled. "I'm coming!" The black queen plunged into the cold depths, and out of sight. Fawnkit and Icekit waited anxiously for her to emerge, Waveripple's tail wrapped around their small bodies. He was trembling, his blue eyes dimming as every second passed.

Finally, after what seemed like a moon, a dark head burst out of the water, a small, unmoving black shape in her jaws. Minnowheart scrambled out of the water, her sides heaving. She set Shadekit down gently, drying her wet fur with strong, urgent licks.

"Let me through!" Mossdapple, the medicine cat, pushed her way past the gathered cats, her apprentice, Honeypaw, hurrying after her. The tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat pushed away Minnowheart gently, and pumped Shadekit with her paws. After a while, she finally sat back, her amber eyes dull.

Nothing had happened.

"What's wrong?" Fawnkit wailed. "Shadekit, wake up! Stop messing around!" She darted forward, pushing her nose into her littermate's fur. Shadekit's body was cold, not a hint of warmth behind drying fur. A strange, unfamiliar scent hit her nostrils.

"Shadekit?" Minnowheart trembled, looking down at her unmoving kit. She nudged her with her nose, but the small black lit flopped onto the ground, lifeless.

"It's too late," Mossdapple whispered calmly, though her eyes betrayed grief. "Shadekit has joined StarClan's ranks."

"What do you mean?" Icekit looked up at the medicine cat. Fawnkit turned to Honeypaw, desperate.

"I'm so sorry," The gentle apprentice murmured. "Shadekit is dead."

Consequences

Fawnkit buried her nose into Icekit's shoulder as Poppyheart, one of the elders, carried Shadekit's body to a small hole in the soft earth. She couldn't help but notice how small and fragile her sister looked, all alone in the cold damp hole.

"Shadekit has left us far too early," Waveripple rasped. "I hope she finds peace and happiness in StarClan."

Minnowheart let out a sob, and murmured, "Oh, my precious kit. What will I do without you?"

"You were the best at making up a game," Icekit mewed sadly. "Make sure to teach all the kits in StarClan about hunting down the scale!"

"I'll miss you," Fawnkit whispered. "I'll never forget you."

She watched as Poppyheart scraped the soft dirt over Shadekit's dead body, heartbroken. *What will we do without you?* She wailed silently, repeating her mother's words.

Splashheart, RiverClan's deputy, blinked at her sympathetically. "It's hard to accept the death of someone you care about deeply," He rumbled. "I remember when my brother, Currentkit, died of Greencough. You'll need to move on soon. Just remember that your apprentice ceremony is near."

It won't be the same, Fawnkit wanted to mew, but she nodded miserably instead.

"Come on," Icekit whispered. "Shellstar's calling a meeting."

Indeed, the broad-shouldered leader had leaped onto a large tree stump. "Let all cats old enough to swim gather around Highstump to hear my words!" He yowled.

When everyone had crowded around him, Shellstar began the clan

meeting.

"Shadekit's death was a terrible tragedy," He began. "I am going to reinforce the rule that no kits will ever go outside of the camp until they are six moons old. These are the consequences of breaking the warrior code.

"On a happier note, I am delighted to announce that two of our apprentices will become warriors today. Petalpaw, Pikepaw, stand forward."

Petalpaw straightened up, her green eyes bright with excitement, though a shadow of grief had passed her gaze. Her brother, Pikepaw, bounded over to Shellstar, his tail quivering.

"I, Shellstar, leader of RiverClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn.

"Petalpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." The young pale cream apprentice's voice trembled as she spoke.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Petalpaw, from this moment you will be known as Petalwish. StarClan honors your kindness and patience, and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan."

The powerful leader continued with Pikepaw. "Pikepaw, from this moment you will be known as Pikefang. StarClan honors your bravery and strength in battle, and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan."

"Petalwish! Pikefang!" The clan cheered. Fawnkit yowled out her clanmate's names, but her mind was on one sentence Shellstar had said.

These are the consequences of breaking the warrior code.

Too Less Love

After the meeting had ended, Fawnkit padded inside the nursery. Minnowheart was inside, her nose tucked under her tail. Her green eyes were shadowed with grief and anger.

"Minnowheart?" Fawnkit whispered. "I'm hungry."

She laid down besides her mother and started to suckle, but Minnowheart pushed her away.

"No." She looked down at her kit. "If you think you're old enough to leave the camp, you're old enough to eat fresh-kill."

"But I want milk!" Fawnkit complained, her heart aching with sadness. Minnowheart glared at her.

"I said, you can go eat fresh-kill now," She growled.

Her tail drooping, Fawnkit left the nusery. Icekit was padding towards the nursery, and he brushed past her fawn-colored pelt.

A second later, he darted past her, his blue eyes wide with terror. Minnowheart had chased him away, her green eyes alight with fury and her sharp fangs bared.

"No," Icekit mewed sullenly. "I'm hungry."

"Go get something to eat from the fresh-kill pile, then," The queen hissed, unsympathetic.

"Come on," Fawnkit murmured. "Let's choose a nice fish to eat."

They dragged a small chub out of the fresh-kill pile, and settled down besides it.

"I'll go first," Fawnkit ventured.

Icekit sniffed at the silver fish. "It smells weird."

After a moment of hesitation, Fawnkit tried taking a bite from the chub. However, her teeth weren't growing yet, and she was unable to penetrate the flesh. She awkwardly used her small claws to rip a small piece off the fish, and licked it up.

"What does it taste like?" Icekit asked, curious. Fawnkit was still gnawing at her piece, unable to speak. The chub tasted revolting, its rotten taste filling her mouth. She gagged. Icekit dug out a small piece, and chewed on it, wrinkling his nose.

Pawsteps sounded behind her, and Fawnkit looked back to see Shellstar looking disapprovingly down at them.

"What do you think you two are doing?" He growled. The huge blue-gray tom glared at them. "Spit that out this instance!"

Icekit spat out the small portion of chub. "It tastes horrible!" He coughed. "I want to drink milk!"

"And you should be!" Shellstar mewed. "You could choke on fresh-kill, and your teeth aren't even growing! You're wasting prey a hungry warrior could be eating!"

"We didn't want to eat this dumb fish!" Fawnkit wailed, dropping out her own piece of chub. "Minnowheart told us that we're too old to suckle now!"

"You're two moons old!" Shellstar glanced at the nursery. "But your mother is grieving. I'll talk to Minnowheart. In the meantime, you can leave the fish and follow me."

Fawnkit rasped her tongue over her nose repeatedly, trying to get rid of the disgusting taste that spoiled her mouth. Her belly rumbled pitifully, and Shellstar twitched his ear at the sound.

"Minnowheart!" He called as they entered the nursery. Minnowheart was curled up in her nest, her eyes closed.

"What is it?" She sighed.

"You're kits are two moons old! They shouldn't be eating fresh-kill yet!" Shellstar hissed. "However much you are missing Shadekit,

you should take care of your remaining kits!"

"It's partly their fault anyways," Minnowheart snapped. "Do whatever you want with them, but *keep me out of it!"*

The Runaway

Fawnkit was dreaming. She swiped at a fish in a small pond, purring with amusement as it flopped helplessly on the bank, its silvery scales glowing in the faint moonlight. She lifted her paw again, poised to strike at another fish, when it suddenly shifted into an achingly familiar face with bright blue eyes.

"Shadekit?" Fawnkit whispered.

"You're as slow as a slug, Fawnkit!" The dead black kit yowled, racing off into the river. She swam as smooth as an eel, her small paws easily splitting the gentle waters. "You'll never catch me!"

"Be careful!" Fawnkit called. "You might drown!"

"I won't!" Shadekit laughed, but her head immediately went under as the water suddenly lashed out, the calm blue waves suddenly thrashing angrily. She burst out of the water. "Fawnkit! Fawnkit!"

"Shadekit!" The young fawn-colored kit woke up, her heart hammering at her chest.

"Fawnkit? Are you okay?" A small white tom peered at her with anxious blue eyes. Minnowheart was asleep, curled up in her own nest. It had been almost four moons since she'd talked to Fawnkit and Icekit, and she barely looked at them. Ottersplash, the kindly cream queen, had taken care of them, feeding them as well as her own kits, Stormkit and Lilykit.

"Icekit?" Fawnkit murmured. "It's night; go back to sleep."

"I know...Fawnkit," Icekit began awkwardly. "I can't stand how Minnowheart hates us now, and Waveripple barely lets us play a tail-length away from him. I hate how Minnowheart doesn't recognize us as her own kit, I hate how it's Ottersplash who's taking care of us now, I hate that it's my fault that Shadekit's dead."

"It isn't your fault that she's dead," Fawnkit whispered. "It was her path. You know how Honeypaw tells us all about StarClan all the time. It was her time to go."

"I know. It was her destiny." Icekit looked away. "Fawnkit...I- I'm running away."

"What?" Fawnkit cried, barely controlling her voice level.

"Hush!" Icekit mewed nervously, glancing at Willowfeather, who had sensitive ears that heard almost everything. Thankfully, the gray queen didn't wake up. Brookkit, her lone kit, was fast asleep. "Be quiet! I can't stand how Shadekit's death hangs around me like thorns on a rose! I hate it here; I don't want to live in a place that killed her."

"I know, but it's our apprentice ceremony today," Fawnkit trembled. "I wanted to be the best warrior ever, standing besides my littermates."

"Then come with me," Icekit urged. "Let's live as loners, catching prey and eating our heart's desire."

Fawnkit thought for a moment. It did sound nice, but she didn't want to think about how devastated Waveripple would be if he found out that his two remaining kits had disappeared.

Minnowheart...would her mother even notice she'd gone?

"Icekit," Fawnkit entwined her tail with her littermate's. "I'd hate to be apart with my only surviving littermate. But my heart lies here, besides the lake, with all five clans. You should go now, if you must. It's your destiny; I won't choose it."

Icekit and Fawnkit slipped out of the nursery. They sneaked past Troutfur and Bristlebranch, the two young warriors that were guarding the camp. They'd fallen asleep, thankfully.

"I'll never forget you," Icekit whispered.

"I love you," Fawnkit murmured. "Good luck, and safe travels."

And without turning back, Icekit bounded onto the slippery rocks that led away from RiverClan.

The Ceremony

After Icekit had slipped out of sight, swallowed by the shadows, Fawnkit turned to trudge back to camp. She froze as she noticed that Troutfur and Bristlebranch were awake, pacing back and forth.

"I wonder when Honeypaw's going to get his medicine cat name," Troutfur was mewing. "Petalwish and Pikefang already got their full name ages ago."

"Soon, I'm guessing," Bristlebranch mewed. "Mossdapple's getting old, you know. He can't stay an apprentice for any longer."

"Who do you think is going to be Fawnkit and Icekit's mentor?" Bristlebranch asked her brother.

"Us?" Troutfur shrugged.

"No way Shellstar's going to choose us!" Bristlebranch purred. "We've almost just been made warriors!"

"It's been a moon, though," Troutfur pointed out. "Maybe if we're lucky..."

Fawnkit thought quickly, and her mind clicked as an idea formed in her head. She sneaked towards the dirtplace, squeezing in through the clumped branches of the bush, and pretended to walk out.

"Who's there?" Bristlebranch stiffened, her brown-and-gray pelt spiked up.

"It's just me, Fawnkit," The kit mewed. "I went to the dirtplace."

"You better go to sleep," Troutfur purred. "Tomorrow's a big day for you."

"I can't wait!" Fawnkit lied. "Icekit and I will be the best warriors ever!"

As she curled up in the nest she'd shared with Icekit just a few moments ago, Fawnkit couldn't help but feel her heart ache with sadness.

First Shadekit, now Icekit. I'm on my own now.

"Fawnkit! Wake up!" Fawnkit woke up, yawning, as Ottersplash shook her awake.

"What is it?" She blinked up sleepily.

"Icekit's missing!" The gentle cream she-cat wailed. "I can't find him!"

Fawnkit wanted to tell her foster mother about how Icekit had escaped, but she bit her tongue.

"Icekit? But it's our apprentice ceremony!" Fawnkit mewed. Just then, Shellstar's powerful yowl echoed throughout the camp.

"Let all cats old enough to swim gather around Highstump for a clan meeting!"

"Oh, dear, it's starting!" Ottersplash licked Fawnkit's pelt frantically. "Come on, let's go."

"What about Icekit?" Fawnkit wailed.

"I'm sure he's waiting outside for you," The queen murmured, but the fawn-colored kit could see that she didn't believe her own words. "Come on, you're going to be late."

"It's time for two of our kits to become apprentices," Shellstar was mewing, his deep blue eyes shining. "Icekit, Fawnkit, come forward."

"Icekit's missing!" Ottersplash yowled. "He's not anywhere!"

"He's probably gone to the stream again," Minnowheart growled. "Maybe he drowned."

"Well, in that case, we'll need to search for him." Shellstar looked

down sadly. "However, Fawnkit can get her apprentice name first. Fawnkit, come forward."

"Fawnkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Fawnpaw. Your mentor will be Petalwish. I hope Petalwish will pass down all she knows on to you."

"Petalwish, you are ready to take on an apprentice. You had received excellent training from Flickerfoot, and you have shown yourself to be kind and patient. You will be the mentor of Fawnpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to her."

Fawnpaw touched noses with Petalwish, and she couldn't help feeling excited. The pale cream warrior's green eyes were shining with pride.

Icekit and Shadekit might be gone, but my destiny is to be the best warrior I can be in RiverClan!

A Warrior at Last

It had been six moons since Icekit had run away from RiverClan, and ten moons since Shadekit had drowned in the river that ran the border of RiverClan and ThunderClan territory. Drops of Icekit's blood had been found, with claw marks and his fur, the entire place stinking of fox. Fawnpaw had spent the first day of her apprenticeship mourning and grieving her brother.

Willowfeather's kits had been kitted soon after she'd been made an apprentice, Volekit, Mousekit, Twigkit, and Flowerkit, though Volekit had died from a terrible sickness that even Mossdapple and Honeyfall couldn't cure.

Waveripple's littermate, Cherryleap, had moved into the nursery, carrying Beechclaw's kits. Leopardpelt had moved into the nursery as well, heavy with Rippletail's kits. Minnowheart had died from an infected shoulder wound that refused to heal, and although she hadn't cared for her since Shadekit had died, Fawnpaw still felt a pang of grief and sat through her vigil.

It had been long since Fawnpaw had been the only apprentice, when Mistflower and Hailstripe had became warriors. Thankfully, Stormpaw and Lilypaw had become apprentices soon after, and the three apprentices had shared an unbreakable bond.

"Fawnpaw, step forward." Shellstar's deep mew rumbled in her ears. The powerful leader was growing old, his muscular build growing thinner, and his sleek pelt speckled white. "I, Shellstar, leader of RiverClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn."

"Fawnpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect even at the cost of your life?" He asked.

"I do." Fawnpaw's trembling mew escaped from her, barely audible.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Fawnpaw, from this moment you will be known as Fawnheart. StarClan honors your gentleness and readiness for anything, and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan."

"Shellstar, I'd like to request something," Fawnheart lifted her head high, though her heart was thumping.

"You are welcome to speak," The old RiverClan leader rasped.

"I- I'd like to be called Fawnshade," Fawnheart mewed. "In honor of my sister, who died when she was a kit."

"Very well." Shellstar dipped his head. "Then by the powers of StarClan, you will be known as Fawnshade. We welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan."

After a moment of stunned silence, the cats of RiverClan started cheering.

"Fawnshade! Fawnshade! Fawnshade!"

Fawnshade couldn't help but feel proud.

Shadekit, Icekit, wherever you are, I'm a warrior at last.

The Warning

A few sunrises had passed after her warrior ceremony. Fawnshade still remembered how on the very day of her apprentice ceremony, she'd found out that Icekit had been killed by a fox while escaping RiverClan.

She was currently fishing in the very same river that had taken Shadekit's life. *It's strange how this river caused so much pain, yet we can barely survive without it,* Fawnshade thought. *Then again, we have the lake as well.*

She scooped a fat trout out of the water, delivering the killing blow to its neck. Fawnshade picked up her catch proudly; a trout and several minnows would make a feast, including the fresh-kill the other warriors from the hunting patrol had caught.

Satisfied with her catch, the fawn-colored warrior picked up the fresh-kill in her jaws, heading back to camp. She swam with her head out of the water so that the fish didn't get wet, and emerged on the other side, shaking out her thick fur.

Fawnshade had had trouble getting used to swimming after she'd seen her littermate drown with her very eyes, and it took several days before Petalwish persuaded her that the water wouldn't hurt her if she knew how to swim.

I'm a long way from the frightened apprentice I was a long time ago, Fawnshade thought.

She pricked her ears as she picked up Stormpaw's familiar yowl. Fawnshade ran into camp, her jaws full of fresh-kill. Stormpaw was panting in the clearing, his sides heaving.

"What's going on?" She whispered to Mistflower, setting down her catch in the fresh-kill pile.

"Hear it yourself." The pretty silver she-cat nodded to Stormpaw.

He'd begun to talk, his mew clear in the silence of the camp.

"WindClan has crossed the borders!"

The Battle

The entire clan listened intently as Stormpaw told Shellstar about how the border patrol had been ambushed.

"Who was on the patrol?" The leader asked.

"G-Grasswing, Petalwish, Mistflower, Lilypaw, and me," Stormpaw panted. "Grasswing told me t-to run and get backup."

"I see." Shellstar nodded seriously. He flicked his tail at Splashheart. "Splashheart! Gather a group to help the border patrol. I'll bring more cats if you need help."

Splashheart turned to the gathering cats. "Beetlewing, Flickerfoot, Birdstrike, Flamewhisker, Petalwish, Waveripple, Pikefang, Bristlebranch, Hailstripe, and Fawnshade!" He yowled. "You're on my patrol!"

"Should I bring Stormpaw?" Pikefang asked.

"If he's ready," Splashheart growled.

"Troutfur, Beechclaw, Ottersplash, Streamheart, and Russetclaw, you're coming with me," Shellstar mewed briskly. "The rest of the clan will guard the camp. Protect the queens, kits, and elders."

"We'll fight, too," Cherryleap snarled, curling her tail around her bulging belly. "No one harms our kits!"

"Stay close to me at all times, and hide under the nest," Willowfeather murmured to her kits. She blinked at Russetclaw. "Be careful!"

"Come on," Splashheart ordered briskly, heading towards the WindClan border. "Our clanmates need help."

Fawnshade gaped at the scene of screeching, fighting cats. The

RiverClan border patrol was heavily outnumbered by the countless WindClan warriors. She could just make out Petalwish, her former mentor, clawing at two warriors at the same time.

"RiverClan, attack!" Splashheart yowled. Fawnshade leaped at a skinny dark-brown tabby warrior, who had sunk his fangs into Petalwish's shoulder. She raked her claws across his nose, prying him off the pale cream she-cat's back. The warrior let out a shriek of alarm before racing away.

"Thanks," Petalwish panted, before turning to a light brown she-cat, using powerful blows to knock her to the ground.

"Fawnshade!" Lilypaw wailed. Fawnshade turned around to see a huge black warrior pinning the small apprentice to the ground, his bloodstained teeth drawn back into a snarl. She jumped onto the warrior's back, digging her claws into his thin pelt. Fawnshade felt the warrior trying to shake her off, but she held on tight, clawing his ears with a strong blow. He finally managed to throw her off, and she let out a gasp as she landed on the ground heavily.

"Why don't you pick on someone your own size?" Fawnshade hissed, lunging forward and nipping him sharply on the paw. She let out a yowl of pain as the huge warrior dug his teeth into her scruff, shaking her until she felt a sharp pain in her head.

Lilypaw, who had been frozen on the ground with fright, lunged forward, yanking the WindClan warrior's tail with her jaws. The tom let out a screech, and let go of Fawnshade. He bit onto her leg and pulled. Fawnshade let out a sharp cry of pain as she felt something in her shoulder pop.

"Leave my daughter alone!" A familiar growl sounded behind her, and Waveripple lashed his sharp claws at the warrior's ears, kicking him with powerful legs.

"WindClan, retreat!" Rabbitleap, WindClan's deputy, yowled. The huge warrior turned to snarl back at the RiverClan warriors one last time, before disappearing into their own territory.

Loss

Fawnshade collapsed on the ground, overcome by exhaustion and pain. Her shoulder felt like it was on fire, and her scratches stung like fire ant bites. Lilypaw nosed through her pelt, licking furiously at a bleeding wound. Petalwish was lying on the ground, her pale cream pelt red with blood. Her sides were moving faintly up and down to show that she was alive.

"Fawnshade." Splashheart dipped his head towards the young warrior. "Waveripple wants to see you."

"Why?" She asked. "Is he alright?"

"He's injured severely." The white tom sighed. "He has a deep wound in his belly."

Fawnshade limped towards her father, his bloodied white fur matted and bearing claw-marks. He blinked up at her faintly, his deep blue eyes clouded with pain.

"Fawnshade..." He murmured. "I'm...so...sorry..."

"Save your energy," The fawn-colored she-cat whispered, licking his fur. A steady stream of blood spilled out of his broken body. "Honeyfall and Mossdapple will save you. You'll be fine. Cherryleap's expecting kits! You'll have kin to play with, and Rippletail's kits will be born soon! We'll make them the best apprentices ever...remember?" Her voice caught in her throat. *StarClan, don't take Waveripple from me, too!* Fawnshade wailed silently.

"It's my time," Waveripple rasped. "I'm glad...I...saw...one...of...my kits...become fine warriors... I'm...so...sorry..."

"No! Fawnshade breathed. "You'll be fine. You'll be okay. You'll see your kin, you'll see me, and you'll grow old in the elder's den until StarClan comes to you."

"I see them all!" Waveripple purred weakly. "I see them...Shadekit, Raggedtail, Volekit...oh, Minnowheart, my dearest love..."

Fawnshade squeezed her eyes shut, resting her paws on her father's side. "No, that's all the cats from StarClan! You're seeing things! You aren't dying!"

"Goodbye...my beautiful kit..." Waveripple became colder by every second, his breaths growing slow and shallow.
"I'll...see...you...one...day...Far from now..."

His breathing stopped, and his eyes stared into air, their kind blue depths cold and emotionless. The ground he'd laid on was soaked in his blood. His tail went limp, and the same strange scent that had surrounded Shadekit when she'd died by the river filled her nose.

Fawnshade let out a grief-stricken wail. "Waveripple's dead!"

The Vigil

Everything afterwards was all an unrecognizable blur. Someone- Shellstar?- had guided Fawnshade back to camp, Honeyfall had treated her wounds and told her that she'd dislocated her shoulder, though she'd refused to have it set back until Waveripple's vigil was over.

Fawnshade was settled by Waveripple's cold body, flanked by Cherryleap and Rippletail. *Shadekit, Icekit, and Minnowheart should be here,* She thought numbly.

The sky was brightening, and the elders would come to burry his dead body later. Fawnshade stroked her paw over his smoothed lavender-smelling fur, breathing in his fading scent one last time.

He was the only cat I had in my family. She buried her nose into his pelt. *And now he's gone, too.*

At dawn, Honeyfall approached her, his green eyes sympathetic.

"Fawnshade," The golden tom mewed softly. "I'll need to treat your shoulder now. It might get worse."

She stared at him numbly. *Who cares? Waveripple's in StarClan; why should I care if I have one dumb dislocated shoulder?*

Honeyfall guided her gently with his tail, letting her lean on his shoulders as she limped towards the medicine cat den. Mossdapple, whose beautiful tortoiseshell fur was speckled gray with age, was sleeping soundly, shifting in her nest.

"This might hurt," He whispered. He set her carefully down in a soft moss nest, and pushed a thick stick towards her. "Bite down on this; I don't want to wake Mossdapple."

Fawnshade took the stick in her jaws. Honeyfall held up her leg, careful not to sink his fangs into her skin, and pushed with all his

might. Fawnshade bit down on the stick, hard, as a sudden jolt of pain pierced her shoulder. A loud *pop* sounded, and Honeyfall set down her leg, satisfied.

"You're excused from warrior duties for a while, and you'll need to rest that leg," He explained. "I'll give you a poppyseed for the pain."

Fawnshade obediently lapped up the small black seed, and felt a pulse of tiredness washing over her almost immediately. She yawned, closing her eyes, and settled into a deep sleep.

Healing and Grief

A half moon had passed since Waveripple's death, but it felt like it'd been only been a sunrise ago when Fawnshade had sat at his vigil. Honeyfall had told her that she could resume her duties, but to take it easily. His blue eyes had been dull and distracted ever since Mossdapple hadn't woken up from her nest a few sunrises ago.

"I've already told Splasheart to take it easy on you," He mewed. "You should go; I hear him calling for you."

Fawnshade nodded her thanks to Mossdapple, and headed towards Splashheart.

"Fawnshade, you're going on a border patrol with Flamewhisker, Bristlebranch, and Petalwish," He instructed. "And you're going to the Gathering tonight."

"You should let Stormpaw and Lilypaw go." Fawnshade sighed, closing her dull green eyes in grief. "I'm not very interested. They'd love to go, and it'd be good experience for them."

"That's true," Splashheart admitted. "But Shellstar asked you to go specifically. It'll be good for you to see the other clans again."

A soft growl rumbled in the usually gentle she-cat's throat. "I don't want to see Waveripple's killer so soon after his death," She hissed. "Let the apprentices go. I want to stay at camp."

"Fine," Splashhheart shrugged. "I'll go tell Shellstar later, then. But you *are* going on the border patrol."

Fawnshade nodded, and trudged towards the waiting warriors.

"Good, you're here," Flamewhisker mewed briskly. "We're patrolling the ShadowClan border; We've caught a whiff of their scent too close to the border these days."

"But we don't want another battle." Petalwish glanced at Fawnshade. "We've suffered too much already."

"If a ShadowClan warrior puts one claw in our territory, I'll rip them apart so all that's left of them is a scrap of fur!" Bristlebranch exclaimed, unsheathing her claws.

"Then ShadowClan would want revenge on us, and we'd have another battle," Petalwish pointed out. "Some of us are still recovering, you know." The pale cream she-cat twitched her ear. It was true; a deep wound was still healing on her side, and she was limping slightly with every step.

Fawnshade had trailed after the patrol, marking their border by the ShadowClan border. While the rest of the patrol had been cheerful and talkative, she'd stayed silent the entire time. Only one thought echoed in her numb mind.

Waveripple's in StarClan; he'd miss this patrol so much. Why should I enjoy it if he can't?

Wise Words

Fawnshade padded towards the fresh-kill pile, picking a small water vole for herself. She settled down by an empty spot near the warrior's den.

"Fawnshade!" She looked up from her prey to see Mistflower bounding towards her. "Shellstar wants to talk to you. He said to go meet him in his den."

She looked down at her fresh-kill, and stood up wearily, padding towards the old leader's den. Fawnshade slipped inside, where Shellstar was waiting for her.

"Fawnshade." The blue-gray tom dipped his head towards the young warrior. "I think you know why I called you here."

Fawnshade remained silent.

"Waveripple's death was over a half-moon ago," He mewed gently. "You need to get over his death; Waveripple died a warrior's death, and he's doing well in StarClan."

"He should be here with me, with Cherryleap, playing with her kits, with Rippletail, helping him calm down when Leopardpelt starts her kitting," Fawnshade whispered, her voice catching in her throat. "You don't know what it feels like, to have your sister die from something that the clan has always depended on; to lose your remaining littermate to a fox; to know that your mother hated you till she died. Waveripple was all I had, and he's dead."

"But you should think about this in Waveripple's perspective," Shellstar rasped. "Would he be happy in StarClan, knowing that his kit is grieving for him, never recovering after his death? I know this is hard for you, but everyone has lost someone. That's the way of clan life."

"I didn't just lose *someone*," Fawnshade growled. "I lost everything I

had; my littermates, my mother, now my father. I lost everything that meant something to me."

Maybe Icekit was right, She thought. *Maybe clan life isn't as good as I thought. If I were a rogue, would I be so devastated, so full of grief?*

"But you have Petalwish, Ottersplash, Stormpaw, Lilypaw, and the entire clan," Shellstar pointed out quietly. "They all care for you; though they aren't your kin. Ottersplash loves you as much as a mother could love her kits. Stormpaw and Lilypaw are your best friends. They hate to see you so distant. And Petalwish; do you think any mentor would hate their apprentice?"

Fawnshade didn't reply, but she knew that Shellstar could see that the silence meant that she was thinking about his words, the words that had change her entire perspective of thinking.

"You may go, Fawnshade." He blinked his deep blue eyes that held more wisdom than the oldest elder.

Fawnshade stood up, and whispered, "Thank you."

I might have thought otherwise, but maybe I was never really alone.

Allegiances (Updated)

RiverClan:

Leader: Shellstar- Blue-gray tom with broad shoulders and blue eyes

Deputy: Splashheart- White tom with amber eyes and a splash of black fur on his chest

Medicine cat: Honeyfall- Thick-furred golden tom with blue eyes

Warriors:

Beetlewing- Gray she-cat with white patches and blue eyes

Flickerfoot- Yellow tabby she-cat with a white front paw and green eyes

Birdstrike- Silver she-cat with blue eyes

Streamheart- Blue-gray tom with amber eyes

Beechclaw- Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Russetclaw- Red tom with green eyes

Rippletail- Silver tabby tom with amber eyes

Flamewhisker- Orange-and-white tom with green eyes

Leopardpelt- Pale yellow she-cat with black spots and blue eyes

Grasswing- Gray she-cat with light green eyes (Apprentice, Lilypaw)

Petalwish- Pale cream she-cat with green eyes

Pikefang- Pale brown tabby tom with blue eyes (Apprentice, Stormpaw)

Troutfur- Gray tabby with amber eyes

Bristlebranch- Brown she-cat with gray patches and amber eyes

Mistflower- Silver tabby she-cat with green eyes

Hailstripe- Gray-and-white tom with blue eyes

Fawnshade- Fawn-colored tabby she-cat with green eyes

Ottersplash- Cream-colored she-cat with blue eyes

Apprentices:

Stormpaw- Dark gray tom with amber eyes

Lilypaw- Pale tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Queens:

Willowfeather- Pale gray she-cat with blue eyes, nursing Russetclaw's kits (Flowerkit, a calico she-kit with green eyes, Twigkit, a reddish-brown tabby tom with dark green eyes, and Mousekit, a dark brown tom with blue eyes)

Cherryleap- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes, nursing Beechclaw's kits (Clamkit, a dilute tortoiseshell she-kit with light blue eyes, and Lavanderkit, a pale lavender she-kit with hazel eyes)

Elders:

Berrytail- Black tom with green eyes and a short tail

Poppyheart- Dark red she-cat with green eyes

Spotpelt- Black tom with white ears and spots on his fur, amber eyes

Patchfur- Tortoiseshell tom with amber eyes

A Change of Perspective

Fawnshade slowly chewed on her vole; Shellstar's words were stuck into her head like burrs on a cat's fur.

Ottersplash always loved me, She thought. *Stormpaw and Lilypaw are my best friends; they care for me like I'm their sister. Waveripple's kin always cared for me when Minnowheart turned her back on me.*

Fawnshade felt a pang of guilt as she thought of Cherryleap. *Her kits were kitted just a few sunrises ago, and I didn't even see them yet.*

She finished off her fresh-kill, and padded towards the nursery hesitantly. Would they still want to see her? Fawnshade didn't know.

"Cherryleap?" She breathed. The tortoiseshell queen turned around, her green eyes happy but weary.

"Fawnshade! At last!" Cherryleap purred. "I was wondering when you'd come. I'm happy to see a small sign of Waveripple in the clan."

Fawnshade swallowed back her grief at the thought of Waveripple. She'd already mourned enough for the last half-moon. Instead, she looked warmly at Cherryleap's kits.

"These are your kits, right?" Two small furry kits were suckling hungrily at the tortoiseshell she-cat's belly.

"Yup! This is Lavenderkit." Cherryleap told her, licking the smallest kit, who's lavender pelt was soft and downy. "The pale tortoiseshell is Clamkit."

"Welcome to the world, young ones," Fawnshade murmured softly, bending down to sniff each of them. "They'll be good warriors one day."

"Maybe a medicine cat," Cherryleap added. "Leaf-bare is coming,

and Honeyfall can't be the only medicine cat in the clan."

"He's far from old, though." Fawnshade pointed out. "He has a long life ahead of him."

"And so do you." The tortoiseshell queen rasped her tongue over her head. "Live your life well; don't waste it on grief. My brother wouldn't like it if he finds out his daughter is upset over his death."

Fawnshade nodded. "It's getting late. I'm sorry to disturb you. See you tomorrow!" She purred.

Maybe life'll get easier faster than I thought.

Apprentice

A few sunrises had passed since Fawnshade's meeting with Shellstar. Stormpaw and Lilypaw had happily attended the Gathering in her place, and was filled with news from the other clans.

"Let all cats old enough to swim gather by Highstump to hear my words!" He rasped. Fawnshade was worried the old leader; every day, he seemed to be getting weaker and thinner. His muzzle was completely silver, with speckles of of blue-gray here and there. His shoulders were hunched forward, and he had the gaunt look of an elder.

He has *been here longer than Poppyheart,* Fawnshade thought. *I wonder how many lives he has left?*

"Willowfeather's kits are ready to become apprentices," Shellstar continued, his weary gaze landing on the two nervous kits. "Flowerkit, come forward."

The calico she-cat stumbled forward, her green eyes stretched wide anxiously.

"Flowerkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Flowerpaw. Your mentor will be Mistflower. I hope she will pass down all she knows on to you."

"Mistflower, you are ready to take on an apprentice. You had received excellent training from Rippletail, and you have shown yourself to be brave and loyal. You will be the mentor of Flowerpaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to her."

Mistflower bent down to touch noses with the small calico apprentice, her green eyes shining. Fawnshade could see her mouth moving with words only Flowerpaw could hear.

"...From this day on, you will be known as Twigpaw. Your mentor will be Hailstripe. I hope he will pass down all she knows on to you."

Hailstripe joined his sister, his new apprentice looking around at the gathered cats with pride shining in his eyes. Mousekit's eyes were wide with nervousness, as he was the only one remaining without a mentor.

"Mousepaw," Shellstar rumbled. "Your mentor will be Fawnshade. I hope she will pass down all she knows to you."

Fawnshade blinked up at the blue-gray tom, who gazed down at her with warmth in his eyes.

"Fawnshade, you are ready to take on an apprentice. You have received excellent training from Petalwish, and you have shown yourself to be patient and smart. You have suffered a lot of grief, but you have gone past with courage a typical warrior could never show. You will be the mentor of Mousepaw, and I expect you to pass on all you know to him."

Fawnshade touched her nose to Mousepaw's, her heart thumping.

"I will make you the best warrior anyone could be," She murmured.

"I know," Mousepaw breathed. "I'm going to be the best hunter ever!"

Training

"Where will we go today?" Mousepaw bounced along besides Fawnshade. "Learn to fish? Battle tecniques? Oh, what about a border patrol?"

Fawnshade purred in amusement at his eagerness. "We'll explore the territory today. I'll teach you how to swim first thing in the morning tomorrow."

"But...I don't want to swim." Mousepaw looked down, ashamed. "Water's scary!"

"And you should be wary of it," Fawnshade murmured, remembering how Shadekit had went down into the river, screaming for help. "You could drown."

Mousepaw looked up at her, terrified.

"It's alright," Fawnshade mewed quickly. "If you know how to swim, you'll be fine. But that's tomorrow's worries. I'm showing you the territory first."

She was as frightened of the water as her apprentice; Fawnshade wasn't the best swimmer, and she preferred fishing with her paws staying on land.

As Fawnshade showed Mousepaw around RiverClan territory, they stopped at the lake. A patrol of ThunderClan warriors were, thankfully, on their side of the lake, remarking their borders.

"That's ThunderClan," Fawnshade told Mousepaw, flicking her tail to point at the patrol. "Remember their scent. They never bother us, but you can never be too careful."

"What are you looking at?" A brown tabby, who Fawnshade recognized as Brackenclaw, hissed at them. A light gray she-cat called Swiftcloud rested her tail on his shoulder.

"She's showing her apprentice around the territory, mouse-brain!" She turned to Fawnshade, purring. "First time out?"

"This is Mousepaw; he's a new apprentice," She introduced.

"H-hi," Mousepaw stammered, shuffling his paws. "Uh, nice to meet you."

"We'd better go see the ShadowClan border, too," Fawnshade mewed, finding the meeting as awkward as her apprentice. "It's getting unusually quiet around there."

"Well, see you at the next Gathering!" Swiftcloud called after them. Fawnshade quickly ushered Mousepaw away.

"That was a strange meeting," Fawnshade mewed, half to herself.

"They're friendly," Mousepaw pointed out. "And nice."

"Talking with other cats isn't really my biggest strength." Fawnshade looked down. She could picture Minnowheart, looking down at her with disgust. *You are not my kit!*

After a moment of silence, Mousepaw started up the conversation awkwardly. "I heard from Willowfeather about a kit dying when she was in the nursery, but I didn't notice anyone missing."

Fawnshade sighed. "Because that kit was dead before you were born."

"Do you know her?" Mousepaw asked.

"Oh, I know her," Fawnshade murmured. "She was my sister, after all."

Swimming

"Hey, Fawnshade!" Fawnshade looked up from her fresh-kill. Mousepaw was bounding over to her, his blue eyes shining with excitement. "Can we start training right now?"

She blinked up tiredly; She'd been on the pre-dawn patrol, which had been made since WindClan had attacked their territory.

"Sure," Fawnshade blinked, stifling a yawn. She quickly gulped down her chub, and stood up, shaking out her thick fur. "We're going to learn how to swim today."

"I'll show Flowerpaw and Twigpaw that I'm not scared of water anymore!" He announced. "I won't drown, right?"

"Not unless StarClan says so," She padded towards the river. "Come on, Mousepaw. We'll need all that confidence to learn how to swim."

Mousepaw stopped in front of the river, eyes suddenly filled with terror. Fawnshade looked at the river, her paws trembling. This was the place her sister had joined StarClan, the place where her life had suddenly taken the wrong turn. The river was clear and sloshing weakly today, with no sign of the dark, churning water that had swallowed Shadekit.

"We can start in this shallow part of the river," Fawnshade told Mousepaw. "Be careful; it's a bit cold."

She slipped into the water, shivering as the water dragged at her thick coat. The current was weak, but it was still there. Mousepaw splashed inside, gasping as the cold entered his thin fur.

"I-it's c-cold!" He spluttered.

"You'll need to get used to it, I'm afraid." Fawnshade taught the

young brown tom how to kick with his hind legs, using his front paws to swim, and using his tail to balance in the water.

"Now let's go to the deeper part of the river," She mewed, watching approvingly as Mousepaw picked up the training quickly. "And be careful; I don't want to see my first apprentice drowning on his second day of training."

Mousepaw bounded through the shallowed, and slowly paddled into the deep places.

"I'm swimming!" He squealed, and broke off coughing as a wave splashed him in his mouth. "Wait till I see Twigpaw's face!"

"Careful!" Fawnshade breathed, her heart leaping out of her heart every time Mousepaw accidentally mistimed a kick, and went under for a few moments.

"Fawnshade! Can you teach me how to fish no-" He broke off as the current grabbed hold of him, dragging him down to the cold depths of the river.

Hero

"Mousepaw!" Fawnshade yowled, watching in horror as she watched her apprentice go under the water. She froze in terror as Mousepaw's brown fur disappeared into the cold depths. A moment later, she gathered herself and leaped into the water, swimming strongly against the current. "I'm coming!"

Fawnshade let out a gasp, her eyes wide with fright as a wave sloshed into her side, swaying her dangerously. She took a deep breath, and dived down.

She blinked open her eyes, the water stinging her sensitive eyes. She looked around frantically, and swam deeper into the river. The current tugged at her fur, threatening to drag her away too.

Fawnshade spotted a familiar brown pelt, and felt a pang of alarm as she saw that it was Mousepaw, sinking to the bottom of the river. She lunged forward and grabbed his scruff with her jaws as gently as she could, and started to slowly swim upwards.

Fawnshade gasped for air, her lungs aching as she reached the surface. She swam towards the bank, her neck cramping with the effort of dragging Mousepaw along with her.

"What in all of StarClan-?" She heard a familiar mew, and spotted Hailstripe on the bank, carrying a squirrel in his mouth.

"Hailstripe," Fawnshade coughed. "Help me get Mousepaw out-"

A wave suddenly slammed into her, hard, and she went under again. She emerged from the water, coughing. The warrior heaved Mousepaw onto safety.

"Fawnshade! You need to get out now!" Hailstripe yowled. "The river's too dangerous right now!"

Fawnshade tried to drag herself onto land, but the current dragged

her back, its icy grip holding on with impossible strength. She took a last, desperate breath before going under again.

The water was calm under the surface, and Fawnshade felt herself bump onto the pebbly ground. Her skin stung as the sharp rocks cut her flank.

Was this how Shadekit died? She couldn't breathe, and her lungs were out of air. Fawnshade fell limp, closing her eyes. A familiar black pelt flashed at the edge of her vision. *Shadekit!*

The water churned besides her. *Don't let go now!* Her littermate begged. *Stay alive for Mousepaw!*

Fawnshade could feel all her energy drain her body. *I don't think I have a choice.*

I'm so sorry, Mousepaw. I'm so sorry to leave you in this cruel world.

Alive

Fawnshade opened her eyes slowly. "Shadekit?" She rasped.

She was in the medicine den, lying in a soft moss nest. Hailstripe had dozed off, his head rested on the edge of her nest. He woke up groggily.

"Wha..." He blinked, and sat up. "Fawnshade! You're awake!"

"What am I doing here?" Fawnshade asked, confused. "Where's Shadekit?"

"Shadekit?" Hailstripe's voice softened. "Your sister drowned when you were a kit, remember?"

"Oh. I saw her today," She mumbled. "What am I doing in the medicine den?"

"You don't remember?" Hailstripe stared at her. "Mousepaw was drowning, and you rescued him! You're a hero!"

"I am?" Fawnshade couldn't remember any of the things he'd said. "I don't remember that."

"You must've hit your head underwater." The gray-and-white tom shook his head. "I'll fetch Honeyfall."

He left Fawnshade to her own jumbled thoughts. *I didn't rescue Mousepaw...at least, I have no memory of doing so.*

"Fawnshade! Good, you're awake." Honeyfall hurried into the medicine den, Hailstripe at his tail. "Hailstripe, you can go now. I'll handle this."

"What happened?" Fawnshade asked.

"Mousepaw was swimming, and the current dragged him down," Honeyfall explained. "He's safe now, and Pikefang's acting as his

mentor until you're well enough. You managed to rescue him, but the river took you instead. You have a few scratches from the rocks, nothing too serious, but you had a concussion."

"Why can't I remember anything?" She whispered. "I don't remember how I almost drowned."

"It's the shock," Honeyfall mewed simply. "Seeing Mousepaw drowning, and almost dying yourself, triggered a lot of stress and shock. I'm giving you a poppyseed before you sleep. You would've been dead by now, if Hailstripe hadn't dived into the river and pulled you out."

"Please thank him for me," Fawnshade murmured.

"Sure. Anything else?"

"Actually, yes." She hesitated for a moment. "Honeyfall? I saw Shadekit when- when-"

"You were in the river?" Honeyfall guessed.

"I don't remember," Fawnshade admitted. "But I saw her. Is it weird that I saw her? Did it mean that I was close to joining StarClan?"

Honeyfall paused, thinking. "Your brain probably got mixed up a bit; I'm sure it was nothing."

"Alright," She sighed. "If you say so."

But even she could guess that she had been right from his doubtful blue eyes.

Training Session

Fawnshade returned to her duties shortly after she had been rescued by Hailstripe. Mousepaw quickly got over the shock of the river, and became an excellent hunter and swimmer. To Fawnshade's relief, he was smart and caught up with things quickly.

Hailstripe always shared fresh-kill with her, and they trained their apprentices together almost every day. Fawnshade was delighted to have made a new loyal, close friend.

"You need to be quick and smooth, Mousepaw," She instructed to her apprentice. "Keep low on the ground, and yank my tail, hard.

"Like this?" Mousepaw slithered up to her, fast as a fish, and bit down into her tail, pulling as hard as he could. Fawnshade stifled a gasp of pain, and stumbled to the ground. Mousepaw quickly scrambled up her back and gave her a hard blow to the ears.

"Careful," Hailstrip growled. "Be gentle during training."

"Sorry!" Mousepaw squeaked, leaping off Fawnshade's back.

"It's alright." She flicked her tail gingerly. "No harm done."

"You try now, Twigpaw," Hailstripe ordered. "And be careful! This is training, not an actual battle."

Twigpaw darted forward and demonstrated the same thing Mousepaw did on Fawnshade, and looked at his mentor proudly.

"Did I do good?" He puffed.

"You did great!" Hailstripe purred. The reddish-brown apprentice preened under his gaze.

"You can get off me now, Twigpaw," Fawnshade called from underneath him. "I'm defeated."

"Oops!" Twigpaw slithered off her back.

"You both did well," Hailstripe looked at Mousepaw and Twigpaw. "You can choose something from the fresh-kill pile."

When both apprentices had scurried away, he turned to Fawnshade, who was grooming her fur. "Are you okay? The apprentices were a bit rough today."

"I'm alright, Hailstripe. Nothing to worry about," She stood up, shaking her paws. "Come on; we'd better hurry up, before Twigpaw eats every fish on the fresh-kill pile!"

Fawnshade brushed past the gray-and-white tom, her thoughts on how her apprentice had did. *Maybe I should give him something more challenging to work on...He sure is ready to be a warrior!*

She padded towards camp, not noticing Hailstripe's disappointed gaze following her.

Surprising...Or Expected?

Fawnshade, Mistflower, and Hailstripe padded through the territory, discussing their apprentices.

"Mousepaw's eager to learn and hyper, but he's kind and brave," Fawnshade mused. "I think he'll be a fine warrior, if he balances out energy."

"Twigpaw's an excellent apprentice already, but he's a bit too eager to please the clan," Hailstripe sighed. "I need to talk to him some day."

"Flowerpaw's having trouble with battle training," Mistflower admitted. "She doesn't like hurting cats. But she'll soon be the clan's best hunter, and she's got a sensitive nose."

"Stormheart's fallen for her already." Hailstripe noted with amusement. Fawnshade purred; the newly made warrior certainly was staring at the pretty she-cat a lot.

"He's not the only one falling for a she-cat," Mistflower glanced at him mischievously, and Hailstripe shoved his littermate, blushing furiously.

"Shellstar said that Mousepaw, Twigpaw, and Flowerpaw are going to have their warrior assessments tomorrow," Fawnshade announced, breaking the awkward moment. "I think all three of them will do fine."

"Of course!" Mistflower blinked. "I hope they all pass."

"What if Mousepaw fails the assessment?" Fawnshade fretted.

"He'll do fine." Hailstripe glanced at her shyly. "He has a brilliant mentor."

Fawnshade's pelt burned at his gaze, her heart racing. "I'm sure Twigpaw will be okay, too," She murmured at last.

"You two lovebirds are hopeless." Mistflower rolled her eyes, sighing. "Well, I'm excited for *my* apprentice."

Hailstripe bristled. "Who said I wasn't thinking about Twigpaw?" He growled playfully.

"Me. You two better figure out your relationship after their warrior ceremony!" Mistflower teased. Fawnshade's fur prickled with embarrassment.

"We don't have a relationship," She stammered awkwardly.

"Just close friends," Hailstripe agreed.

"Sure." Mistflower cast one last devious glance at the two warriors, before racing off towards camp. Fawnshade couldn't help feeling heartbroken as she recalled Hailstripe's words. Just close friends, he'd said.

What's wrong with me? Am I in love with Hailstripe?

The Warriors

"I, Shellstar, leader of RiverClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn." Fawnshade gazed proudly at Mousepaw. His littermates had already earned their new names, and he was the last of them to get his warrior name.

"Mousepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect even at the cost of your life?" Shellstar repeated the words he had mewed to her when she had become a warrior.

"I do," Mousepaw breathed, his tail twitching with excitement.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Mousepaw, from this moment you will be known as Mousepelt. StarClan honors your bravery and talent, and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan."

The clan cheered as Mousepelt went to join his littermates, his blue eyes shining with pride.

"Flowerstem! Twigleap! Mousepelt!" They yowled. Fawnshade raised her voice with her clanmate's, her heart warming. Hailstripe pressed his fur to her side, purring loudly.

"I knew they'd make it," He mewed. "They worked so hard."

"Like us," Mistflower added. "Though I'm worried about the lack of apprentices."

"Clamkit and Lavenderkit will be apprentices soon," Fawnshade reminded. "But I think Lavenderkit is keener to be a medicine cat."

"Honeyfall isn't that old yet!" Hailstripe laughed. "Though with leaf-bare coming up, it's better to be prepared."

"Two medicine cats are better than one," Mistflower agreed.

"Especially when Leopardpelt's expecting kits!"

"My kin," Fawnshade murmured to herself.

"You have a lot of kin in the clan," Hailstripe reminded her. "Cherryleap, her kits, Rippletail, and his kits!"

"Maybe you'll have kits one day, too," Mistflower mused. "And they'll be *my* kin!"

"Shut up," Hailstripe muttered. Fawnshade's fur prickled, though her heart was leaping with pleasure.

"Well, our apprentices are sitting vigil tonight. We don't have anything to worry about," She mewed. "I'm going to sleep now."

Fawnshade padded to the warrior's den, curling up in her nest. She let out a quiet purr as she saw Hailstripe slipping inside, lying down in his nest besides her. Fawnshade breathed in his familiar scent, closing her eyes, her pelt pressing against his.

"Are we really mates now?" Hailstripe breathed. Fawnshade rasped her tongue across his fur.

"Of course," She whispered. "Forever, even after we go to StarClan."

Sickness

Flickerfoot had been the first one to start coughing.

"Are you okay?" Fawnshade heard Petalwish ask her former mentor.

"Swallowed a snowflake," The beautiful yellow she-cat rasped. "I'm fine."

The snow had covered the camp with a thick white powder, and prey was so scarce Fawnshade had went through days without fresh-kill sometimes.

Flamewhisker's hunting patrol returned to camp, though the only one who carried any fresh-kill was Pikefang, who had managed to catch a skinny mouse.

"I have bad news," Flamewhisker growled. "The river's completely frozen."

"Can't we break the ice?" Splashheart suggested.

"The ice is too thick," The orange-and-white tom shook his head. "We won't be able to rely on the river this leaf-bare."

"What about the lake?" Lilystem piped up.

"Frozen, too," Pikefang sighed. "All we'll have to eat are these scrawny mice!"

Fawnshade spotted Mousepelt padding towards her. "What's the matter?" She questioned.

"What if we all starve?" He looked up at her with wide eyes. "We already lost Patchfur to the cold, and it won't be long before Greencough starts through the camp. Flickerfoot's coughing, too."

"Honeyfall and Lavenderpaw will cure them, then," Fawnshade

soothed. "Everything'll be alright, Mousepelt. I'm sure the water will thaw sooner or later."

A few sunrises later, the river and lake had both not thawed, and Honeyfall announced the most unfortunate news RiverClan had heard since WindClan had attacked them so many moons ago.

"Flickerfoot, Beetlewing, and Streamheart all have Greencough," He reported. "Everyone needs to stay away from each other, and no sharing fresh-kill with anyone."

Fawnshade exchanged an alarmed glance with Hailstripe. "So many already?" She murmured.

"And leaf-bare's just started!" He muttered. "How are we supposed to survive this harsh season with such a hard beginning?"

"I'm sure everything will be fine," Fawnshade comforted. The sound of coughing burst out of the medicine den.

"Everything will be fine."

Everything is Not Fine

By the time leaf-bare had been going on for two moons, the river and lake had still not thawed, prey was scarcer than ever, Greencough was spreading as fast as wildfire, and the cold, hunger, and sickness was claiming a new victim every day.

Fawnshade carried her meager catch of a small vole and a skinny sparrow to where the fresh-kill pile should be. Her head drooped from the weight, though it was hardly anything at all. She was lucky she had a thick pelt, or she'd have joined StarClan by now.

"No!" A grief-stricken wail sounded from the medicine cat den, and Lavenderpaw emerged, her eyes wide. Her pale lavender-brown coat clung onto her sides, where Fawnshade could easily count all of her ribs.

Honeyfall was carrying a limp gray body, his blue eyes dull with grief.

"Grasswing has joined StarClan," He rasped. "May she rest in peace and suffer no more pain."

StarClan had claimed so many brave warriors already; Flickerfoot, Streamheart, Rippletail, Patchfur, and Spotpelt.

Fawnshade sunk to the ground; When would this harsh, devastating leaf-bare going to end? Hailstripe hurried towards her, bounding through the thick snow. His thin pelt was speckled with snow, and his once-lean body was now fur on bones.

"Are you alright?" He whispered in her ear.

"No," Fawnshade breathed. "So many warriors are dead; how will Leopardpelt's kits survive? Their father is already dead, and Leopardpelt is so full of grief."

"Leaf-bare can't go on forever," Hailstripe mewed firmly. "It'll be

newleaf sooner or later, right? And the kits are strong; they'll pull through."

He helped her up, and guided her towards the warrior's den. "What you need right now is rest. It won't do the clan any good for you to catch Greencough as well!"

Fawnshade collapsed in her nest, her body drained from any energy she had.

Oh, Waveripple, please take care of all these brave cats in StarClan!

Good News and Bad News

"Shellstar! Shellstar!" Fawnshade looked up from her fresh-kill, a tiny mouse that was mostly bones. Mistflower was racing into camp, panting. Her silver tabby fur was heavy with snow.

"What is it?" Splashheart emerged from Shellstar's den, slightly disheveled.

"The water's thawed! We can fish again!" Mistflower yowled. Fawnshade blinked, wondering if it was all a dream. Hailstripe purred besides her.

"We can hunt in the river together again," He murmured. "*And* there'll be more food for the clan!"

"Before I can send a hunting patrol, I need to announce something," Splashheart started. "As many of you know, Shellstar had caught Greencough. It's slowly getting worse, and he's already lost two lives. He is on his last life. Honeyfall has decided it is best for you to know this."

A dumbfounded silence settled in the camp. A few disbelieving yowls echoed through the clearing.

"Will he be alright?" Mousepelt asked.

"I don't know," Splashheart sighed, and he suddenly looked very weary. "You'll need to ask Honeyfall."

"I hope Shellstar'll be alright," Hailstripe turned to Fawnshade. "Do you want to go hunting with me?"

Fawnshade started to get up, following her mate, but Splashheart padded towards her.

"Fawnshade, Shellstar wants to speak with you," The white tom mewed. "Come to his den."

Fawnshade glanced at Hailstripe. "I'll be back," She murmured. She slipped into Shellstar's den, holding her breath as the bitter stench of sickness hit the tip of her tongue.

"Fawn...shade..." The elderly leader rasped. "I'm glad I can see you at the last moments of life before I join StarClan."

"You aren't going to join StarClan," Fawnshade mewed. "You'll get better soon. Lavenderpaw found some catmint today."

"It's my time," Shellstar looked at something behind her shoulder. "Oh, Gladewhisper, I missed you so much. My dearest mother..."

Fawnshade remembered with a sickening lurch that he was seeing cats from StarClan, just like Waveripple when he had died.

"Honeyfall!" She wailed. "Shellstar's dying!"

The golden tom hurried into the den almost an instant later. He blinked at the sick leader, whose breathing was becoming shallower with each passing moment.

"There's nothing I can do anymore," He murmured at last. "He's with StarClan now."

"No!" Fawnshade yowled. Honeyfall rested a gentle tail on her shoulder.

"I'll tell the clan that Shellstar is dead," He whispered.

A New Deputy

The entire clan sat vigil for Shellstar. Stormheart and Lilystem laid down close to their father, eyes clouded with grief. Ottersplash sat next to her kits, and let out a mournful wail.

"He led RiverClan almost as long as I was in this clan," Poppyheart, the only remaining elder, rasped. The entire clan was surprised that the oldest elder had been the only one to survive the harsh leaf-bare. "Shellstar was a brave and selfless leader; we will all miss him dearly."

"He always found the time to play with us when we were kits," Stormheart added sadly. "He was the best leader and father anyone could ask for."

Splashheart stood up, his mew cracking with grief. "Shellstar had a long and happy life; I wish he finds peace in StarClan."

Fawnshade looked at Shellstar's limp body numbly. He had guided her through the hardest parts of her life, including when Waveripple had died in the battle between RiverClan and WindClan. Hailstripe pressed against her comfortingly.

One by one, every cat stated their favorite times with the old leader. It was Fawnshade's turn.

"Shellstar was like a father to me," She murmured. "He led the clan through harsh times, and told me to stand strong when I was filled with grief."

Dawn came far too soon, and it was time for Poppyheart to bury Shellstar.

The lone elder gently lifted Shellstar by his scruff, carrying him to the hole in the ground Lilystem, Stormheart, and Ottersplash had dug. The old dark-red she-cat lowered him into the ground, and scraped pawfuls of dirt into the grave.

At last, Splashheart spoke up, his eyes clouded with exhaustion and grief.

"I will go to the Moonpool to become a true leader," He croaked. "And now it is time to name the new deputy."

Fawnshade glanced around the gathered cats; who would Splashheart choose to be his faithful deputy? Beechclaw was too old to lead the clan, but he was wise and never hesitated to go into battle. Perhaps Russetclaw or Flamewhisker would be the best decision.

"I say these words before StarClan, so that the spirits of our warrior ancestors may hear and approve of my choice." Splashheart gazed straight into her eyes.

"The new deputy of RiverClan is Fawnshade."

The Grieving

Fawnshade blinked at Splashheart in shock. "Me?" Her voice came out in a squeak.

"Yes," He nodded. "You are brave and you have guidance that even the most experienced medicine cat can't match. You've experienced how hurtful losing someone is, and you always try finding a peaceful way to end a fight."

"If you say so," Fawnshade murmured. "If you think you've made the best decision, then I will stand by your side as a faithful deputy for as long as I live."

"Fawnshade! Fawnshade! Fawnshade!" The surrounding cats yowled. Hailstripe purred so loudly that it was heard over everyone's chants.

"I'm so proud of you," He whispered in her ear. "You deserve this more than any cat."

"I'm so much younger than all of these warriors," Fawnshade doubted. "How will I do any better than them?"

"You'll be fine," Hailstripe ran his tail down her flank.

"I hope you're right."

Splashheart came back to camp, Honeyfall padding by his side.

"I have received my nine lives and my new name," He announced.

"Splashstar! Splashstar! Splashstar!" Everyone yowled.

"We haven't been able to grieve all the cats we have lost to this harsh leaf-bare," The newly-made leader continued. "I have decided that today will be a day to mourn our fallen. Today, we'll have a feast to remember them."

Splashstar ended his speech and slipped away into his den.

"You need to organize the patrols now, mousebrain!" Hailstripe nudged Fawnshade playfully. "You're deputy, remember?"

"I've forgotten," Fawnshade ducked her head, embarrassed. "Flamewhisker, could you lead a hunting patrol? You can take Petalwish, Twigleap, and Ottersplash."

"Should I take Clampaw?" Ottersplash asked.

"Yes," Fawnshade nodded. "And...Beechclaw can take Lilystem and Mousepelt to patrol the WindClan border. Russetclaw, you can lead Mistflower and Stormheart on another border patrol to the SkyClan border."

She finished sending out the patrols, and turned to Hailstripe. "Do you want to hunt with me?" She asked.

"Of course!" He purred. "Come on, deputy. Let's catch more prey than anyone has seen before!"

Allegiances (Updated)

RiverClan:

Leader: Splashstar- White tom with amber eyes and a splash of black fur on his chest

Deputy: Fawnshade- Fawn-colored tabby she-cat with green eyes

Medicine cat: Honeyfall- Thick-furred golden tom with blue eyes (Apprentice, Lavenderpaw)

Warriors:

Flamewhisker- Orange-and-white tom with green eyes

Russetclaw- Red tom with green eyes

Pikefang- Pale brown tabby tom with blue eyes

Bristlebranch- Brown she-cat with gray patches and amber eyes

Willowfeather- Pale gray she-cat with blue eyes

Mistflower- Silver tabby she-cat with green eyes

Hailstripe- Gray-and-white tom with blue eyes

Ottersplash- Cream-colored she-cat with blue eyes (Apprentice, Clampaw)

Stormheart- Dark gray tom with amber eyes

Lilystem- Pale tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Twigleap- Reddish-brown tabby tom with dark green eyes

Mousepelt- Dark brown tom with blue eyes

Cherryleap- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Flowermoon- Calico she-cat with green eyes

Apprentices:

Lavenderpaw- Pale lavender she-cat with hazel eyes

Clampaw- Dilute tortoiseshell she-cat with light blue eyes

Queens:

Leopardpelt- Pale yellow she-cat with black spots and blue eyes, nursing Rippletail's kits (Galekit, a yellow tom with amber eyes, Whisperkit, a light gray tom with amber eyes, Frostkit, a pure white she-cat with blue eyes, and Wadekit, a gray tom with darker stripes and dark green eyes)

Petalwish- Pale cream she-cat with green eyes, expecting Flamewhisker's kits

Flowermoon- Calico she-cat with green eyes, expecting Stormheart's kits

Elders:

Poppyheart- Dark red she-cat with green eyes

Birdstrike- Silver she-cat with blue eyes

Beechclaw- Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Another Apprentice

Fawnshade watched as Frostpaw, her new apprentice, perform an almost perfect leap-and-twist.

"Great job," She complimented. "I think we can move on to something more challenging."

Frostpaw, being one without a lot of words, just nodded. Fawnshade enjoyed her time with Frostpaw, since the quiet apprentice didn't make things awkward when things didn't work out well.

It had already been five moons since the grief-filled leaf-bare had passed. She'd already been Frostpaw's mentor for three moons, and their relationship was already fairly well.

"Hey, Fawnshade!" A familiar mew made her turn around. Hailstripe was bounding over to her, panting. "Do you want to- oh. You're training Frostpaw."

"Do you want to help?" Fawnshade asked. "Frostpaw's just mastered the leap-and-twist technique, and I'm going to teach her how to escape when someone pins her down."

"Sure," Hailstripe agreed. "I'm a ShadowClan warrior, and I'm going to attack you."

"Watch closely," Fawnshade told her apprentice. She tensed, ready for her mate's attack. Hailstripe leaped, his claws sheathed. He pinned her down easily, baring his fangs.

Just as Fawnshade was about to knock him off balance, something lurched in her belly, and she gasped, the pain making her fall still.

"Are you okay?" Hailstripe immediately crouched down besides her, worry shining in his blue eyes. Frostpaw hurried towards her.

"I'm fine," Fawnshade mewed through gritted teeth. In the past half-

moon, her bellyaches were becoming worse, and she was getting tired easily.

"See Honeyfall," Frostpaw suggested. "You have a lot of stomachaches."

"Frostpaw's right," Hailstripe agreed. "You go see Honeyfall; I'll take care of Frostpaw's training today."

"Alright," Fawnshade murmured reluctantly. She rasped her tongue over his ears. "See you later."

She padded back towards camp, and something kicked the inside of her belly, and she quickened her pace.

"Honeyfall?" Fawnshade called as she entered the medicine den.

"Hi, Fawnshade!" Lavenderpaw greeted. "Honeyfall's busy with Poppyheart right now; you'll need to wait for a bit. I'll get him."

Fawnshade waited patiently for the small apprentice to fetch the golden-furred tom. A moment later, Honeyfall appeared without Lavenderpaw.

"I left Lavenderpaw to treat Poppyheart," He told Fawnshade. "Now, what do you need?"

"I've been having bellyaches since a half-moon ago," She explained. "I was wondering whether you have any herbs for that."

"Hm." Honeyfall examined her for a moment. "I don't think you have a bellyache. Bellyaches only stay for a few days at most."

"Do I have a sickness?" Fawnshade asked worriedly. "I know it's newleaf, but we're still low herbs-"

"No, no," Honeyfall interrupted. "This is good news."

"It- it is?" She blinked. "How?"

Honeyfall looked into Fawnshade's eyes, blue eyes meeting green.

"Fawnshade, you're expecting kits."